

Voce di meche

Reviews of performing arts with emphasis on young artists and small opera companies.

Saturday, September 17, 2016

A NEWBORN ARRIVES!

Translating



Madison Marie McIntosh as the dying Dido and Constance Rogalski as Belinda in Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*

It is indeed a privilege to be present for a birth and we were honored to be among the guests witnessing the birth of a new opera company--the Christman Opera Company. Although no mission statement was present in the program, we gather that the mission is for fledgling opera composer Theodore Christman to present his work to the public while balancing the program with a long-established piece.

Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* has been kicking around since the 1680's, which certainly qualifies it as long-established. We are not sure why so many small companies have presented it in the past year (Heartbeat Opera and Utopia Opera, among others); it is neither the anniversary of Purcell's death nor birth. Since we have already written a great deal about the opera's history, we leave it to you readers to use the search bar so that we may focus on the performances.

The musical values were successful all around with singers chosen for their fine vocal artistry, accompanied by Musical Director Lochlan **Brown** conducting a fine string quartet from the piano. Mr. **Brown** was responsible for the excellent reduction of the score.

As the unfortunate Dido, Queen of Carthage, Madison Marie McIntosh could be heard expanding her wide range from the stratospheric *coloratura* reaches down to a richly textured and strong lower register. The final "When I Am Laid in Earth" was heartbreaking.

As her handmaiden Belinda, Constance Rogalski exhibited an attractive crystalline soprano but failed to make the text clear. This task is nearly impossible with that high *tessitura* and we longed for surtitles to maximize comprehension. Beier Zhao nicely complemented Ms. Rogalski as another handmaiden.

A riveting performance as the Sorceress was delivered by Eowyn Driscoll whose richly resonant voice filled out the text beautifully. Her two accomplices, Raquel Nobile and Sarah Knott completed the trio of tricksters and we could not keep from thinking of Shakespeare's "weird sisters" as they plot to bring Dido down. We observed that somehow Ms. Nobile's diction made the text rather clear, in spite of the high range, especially when she doubled as the *faux*-Mercury, leading Aeneas astray. What a terrific trio!

John Ramseyer sang the role of Aeneas and sang it well. All that was needed to make it a fine performance was a measure of dramatic investment, especially in his interaction with the woman he is wooing and abandoning.

A fine performance was given by Thomas Massey who sang the notoriously humorous "Sailor's Song". He exhibited not only fine vocal skills but a lot of personality.

The chorus contributed a great deal and comprised Shawn Palmer, Clayton G. Williams, and Hajeong Lee, as well as whomever was not singing front and center.

The second half of the program introduced us to Mr. Christman's new opera *Adriana McMannes*, with libretto written by Anna Winslow (who also was director for the entire evening). We have complained a great deal about contemporary opera being devoid of melody and not being entertaining. We had no such complaints last night.

Mr. Christman's writing offered tuneful vocal lines suggestive of mid-20th c. popular music--much in the same way that Johannes Brahms incorporated folk tunes into his serious music. This is anything but "academic" music and is accessible, a point noted by our operatic-newbie companion who enjoyed it enormously.

Translating

The story is an Upstairs/Downstairs tale in which a widower falls in love with his daughter's governess. The obstacle to their marriage is the widower's mother-in-law who spreads ugly gossip about the governess' mental stability. Fortunately she is made to retract her words and the tale has a happy conclusion.

Ms. McIntosh demonstrated her versatility in the role of Adriana with Mr. Ramseyer as her intended. His Broadway style in this role did not mesh perfectly with her operatic *vibrato*.

We were delighted to have another opportunity to see more of Ms. Knott who did a marvelous interpretation of the bibulous mother-in-law from hell. And likewise, seeing Ms. Nobile as Adriana's imperious boss was another treat as she delivered some very funny lines. This was also a great scene for Ms. McIntosh who came across as a modern day Cinderella.

Mr. **Brown** accompanied on the piano. We know of no plans to orchestrate the score but it was fine just as it was performed. We will eagerly await his next offering!

(c) meche kroop

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